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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews composition textbook publishing. It is not enough simply to examine textbooks themselves, rather a methodology of institutional critique demands an examination of the institutions that create and perpetuate instructional materials. It is now more important than ever to examine not only the textbooks themselves, and not only the individual textbook companies, but also the surrounding institutions that enable and disable particular practices. There is strong theoretical support for interrogating institutions that support and feed off one another. Michel Foucault in "Discipline and Punish" talks about the inter-connectedness of institutions or "carceral network." Ways of identifying and selecting appropriate neighboring institutions include: (1) following the money trail; (2) physical locations, including the spaces where authors draft their manuscripts, back to the bookstore and into the classroom; (3) locating the material manifestations of the industry surrounding textbook publishing; and (4) the less tangible institutions such as "higher education," "the government," and "the media." Selection criteria for institutional change include: (1) the neighboring institution must have visible links to the textbook industry; (2) those visible links with textbook publishing must interact with textbooks in a way that can be mapped; (3) the impact of the neighboring institution must be such that its values and assumptions challenge traditional textbook publishing in some way; and (4) the challenges presented to traditional textbook publishing must contain some space for resistance and/or transformation. (Contains 12 references; prompts and a list of selection steps are appended.) (CR)

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[*Note: this paper was one of five in a roundtable. For the context within which this paper was delivered, see the work of Jim Porter, Jeffrey Grabill, Stuart Blythe, and Patricia Sullivan.]

Jim and Pat have already spoken about the basic methods of, and motivations for, this thing we call "institutional critique." Stuart and Jeff, then, have illustrated some particular manifestations of institutional critique in some specific locations. To wrap up our time today, I am going to take institutional critique into yet another site, one which leads me to extend our notion of institutional critique in another direction.

The location of *my* inquiry is composition textbook publishing. Scholars such as Lester Faigley and Richard Ohmann, who have taken on the challenge of examining writing textbooks *through* the institutions which create and perpetuate them, suggest that textbooks are representative of larger social forces: for Faigley, textbooks reproduce the values, assumptions, and modes of control of the middle class and middle management; and for Ohmann, textbooks are disciplinary tools complicitous with the military industrial complex. Both scholars are on to something here. It is not enough simply to examine textbooks themselves, with basically new critical readings of the "textbook-as-well-wrought-urn"; rather, a methodology of institutional critique demands an examination of the institutionS (plural) that create and perpetuate instructional materials.

When interrogating a site such as the composition textbook industry, it is not enough to look at the textbook industry alone, by itself, in isolation. Ten to fifteen years ago, when Ross Winterowd, Mike Rose, Kathleen Welch, and Bob Connors wrote their critiques of practices and products in textbook publishing, the industry itself was somewhat easier to delimit. In the late 1990s, however, the merging and purging of corporate acquisitions has blurred the lines between textbook companies and other media, information services, and "content providers." It is now more important than ever to examine not only the textbooks themselves, and not only the

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individual textbook companies, but also the surrounding institutions that enable and disable particular practices. In the spaces among and between supporting institutions, we might be able to create the space for institutional change.

Theoretical Foundations

There is strong theoretical support for interrogating institutions that support and feed off of one another. In the time allotted today, I'll only have time to discuss Foucault's contribution to this conversation. In Discipline and Punish (a study that functions in some ways as a springboard for our conception of "institutional critique") Foucault completes his examination with a chapter on the inter-connectedness of institutions: what he calls the "carceral network." His explication of the prison, then, does not stop at the confines of the physical plant; instead, Foucault looks at other institutions that are variously related to the activities inside and outside the walls of the panopticon. He writes, and this is a quote:

> The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are it the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects it to his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power. (304)

Thus, it is not the panopticon alone that infuses the prison institution with its power; in addition, the penal system works in concert with a "network" of other institutions. Those institutions might be schools, hospitals, government agencies, churches, medical facilities, and so on. Flowing among these institutions, then, are common systems of knowledge and power production, which both creates and perpetuates the normalizing function. In this light, institutional agency can be within the circulation of power among networks of related institutions. It is to those related, or "neighboring" institutions I turn next.

Neighboring Institutions and the Textbook Industry

What I propose today, and what I will leave you with, is a set of strategies for tracing the material conditions of the composition textbook industry, *through* the discursive construction of power as it moves from one supporting institution to another. I'll use my own project as an illustration.

Questions to address, then, are:

1. How to identify and recognize neighboring institutions?
2. How to select which neighboring institutions are most fruitful for inquiry?
3. How to find the discursive traces which illustrate power flowing from one institution to another? (I should warn you I'll only have time to answer the first two of the three questions.)

For my particular study, which is an "institutional critique" of the composition textbook publishing industry, I needed to identify and select those neighboring institutions appropriate for my inquiry. For starters, I located as many *potential* neighboring institutions as I could, using various definitions of "institutions" – both material and ideological – as a heuristic. I called on assorted cultural theorists for these definitions. The resulting prompts look like this:

Put up transparency with the four prompts on it

Each of these prompts led me to recognize a different set of "neighboring institutions." The first, which is perhaps the most fun, led me to follow the "money trail."

Show money trail illustration

By doing so, I recognized the following as neighbors: the bookstore industry, the used book industry, and economies associated with required "core" courses.

Show "localities" illustration

The second prompt took me to other locations: the space in which textbook authors practice and draft their manuscripts (which is a part of a specific college or university, within a larger state or private system, which in turn is a part of the institution of "higher education"), back to the bookstore, and into the classroom.

The third prompt emboldened me to draw yet another map: one locating the material and physical manifestations of the institutions surrounding textbook publishing: from particular schools, specific classrooms, and assorted computer classrooms and labs in one area, to warehouses storing textbooks, printing companies putting the physical book together, and shipping mechanisms (like UPS, Federal Express, and the United States Postal System) in another area, to Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue offices wherein the decisions are made, as well as the countless individual homes of numerous freelance workers (without benefits, of course). The fourth prompt, in turn, led to less tangible and more conceptual "institutions" circulating within this network: "higher education," "the tenure and promotion system," "the government," "the military industrial complex," "the media," and so on.

Once I had considered the possible institutional networks growing out of the composition textbook industry, I needed to select only a few for further investigation in this project at this time. Because the goal of my *current* study is institutional *change*, my selection criteria for fruitful neighboring institutions were simple:

1. the neighboring institution must have visible links to the textbook industry
2. those visible links with textbook publishing must interact with textbooks in a way that can be mapped (or otherwise drawn)
3. the impact of the neighboring institution must be such that its values and assumptions challenge traditional textbook publishing in some way

4. the challenges presented to traditional textbook publishing must contain some space for resistance and/or transformation

Those criteria allowed me to focus primarily on those institutions which seem to offer the most opportunity for resistance and change. All things considered, the two interconnected institutions of the legislative branch (particularly as it pertains to copyright) and the growing and ever-changing institution of electronic discourse fulfilled my criteria the best. Both have the potential for a radical redefinition of the term "textbook": the concept of "educational fair use" is a key component in the creation of instructional material.

With time so short, and in order to leave room for questions, I will have to leave you with that for today. My colleagues have described how Institutional Critique can be a rhetorical methodology for change. I hope I have given you the briefest taste of how examining the neighboring institutions might open up real pathways for institutional change that might have gone overlooked otherwise.

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Recognizing Neighboring Institutions

Possible Steps

1. Follow the money trail –

2. Find the physical locations –

3. Describe the material manifestations –

4. Include ideological manifestations –

Selecting Neighboring Institutions

For Possible Change

1. **The neighboring institution must have visible links to the textbook industry**

2. **Those visible links with textbook publishing must interact with textbooks in a way that can be mapped (or otherwise drawn)**

3. **The impact of the neighboring institution must be such that its values and assumptions challenge traditional textbook publishing in some way**

4. **The challenges presented to traditional textbook publishing must contain some space for resistance and/or transformation**